

Psychology Safety Lesson

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SPEAKERS

Damien Hardwick, Bev Priestman, Mark Robinson, Paul Barnett, Gary Kirsten, Sue Enquist, Paul Roos, Tim Walsh

Paul Barnett 00:00

Welcome to the lessons from the great coaches podcast. I've learned that you don't do it alone,

00:06

you learn so many different things from so many different coaches. That's an elite learning environment. How you deal with how to be resilient, how important it is to infuse joy in the process of learning. To be a good candidate, you've got to do more than you take.

Paul Barnett 00:24

What an interesting way it is to be a leader. My name is Paul Barnett, and you are listening to the great coaches podcast, where we explore leadership through the lens of high performance sport, by interviewing great coaches from around the world, to try and find ideas to help all of us be better leaders. We started this podcast because we wanted to have better conversations with our families around the dinner table. In a social media world, where the goal is often to be the star of the show, we wanted to change the conversation and talk more about selflessness, leadership and responsibility. And the people we knew who best exhibited these qualities were great sports coaches. As the podcast has grown, the great coaches we have interviewed have shared so much insight and wisdom that we decided to create episodes dedicated entirely to the ideas that have resonated with us the most. Today's episode is on the topic of psychological safety. And it features audio quotes from a wide selection of coaches that we have interviewed from around the world. The lessons from the great coach's podcast, the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, is credited with the saying the whole is greater than the parts, a quote that many leaders have used over the years to encourage their teams to collaborate better. This quote was also the impetus for Project Aristotle, undertaken by Google in 2012, to understand why some of their teams performed better than others. And when they analyzed the data that they had collected, they found that what mattered most to team success wasn't the individual performance of team members, their location or seniority, but rather five key things. The first was dependability, where people get done what is expected on time. The second is structure and clarity, in that team members have clear roles, plans and goals. The third was meaning in relation to their work having a sense of purpose. The fourth was that the impact of their work makes a difference in the

broader context of the organization. And fifth, and most importantly, that the teams had psychological safety. It's a term that's used to define a feeling of safety when it comes to taking risks, being vulnerable. And speaking without fear of negative consequences. Creating an environment that has strong and pervasive psychological safety starts with the leader. And many of the coaches we have interviewed referenced it when describing high performance environments. Here is Australian rules football coach Paul Roos, explaining how psychological safety is visible within a team, and importantly, how the willingness of the leaders to receive the feedback is critical in creating a culture where everyone is aligned on what's valued and expected.

Paul Roos 03:23

You're the site environment is created by the leaders. And I'll give you an example. You know, we if we start with a set of behaviors, and everyone agrees to them, it's a learned skill. It's not it's not as simple as then we start getting everyone's saying do this do that. The first part of it is clearly articulate what's acceptable. And then often we start in a subtle way, you know, we do it poor, well done. Fantastic. What you did yesterday, that was great. Everyone in the room says, Okay, that's, that's interesting. Paul Roos is rewarding, Paul, for that behavior. Fantastic. So we start to have conversations. How do we create a safe place is a great, great question, Paul, we create a safe place as the leader, I'm the first one to receive the real talk. I'm the first one in the room that I say to people, what am I doing really well? What can I do better? As a CEO as a senior coach as the captain of footy club, that's creating a safe space, because if I'm prepared to accept the feedback, as the CEO, or as the coach, then everyone in the room should feel comfortable. And we do it right time, right place, right way. So there are some strategies around it. Because I've often heard of this notion of 360 degree anonymous feedback, which for me, is just complete garbage. I mean, if you're trying to set up a culture of transparency and honesty and trust and psychological safety, that's the worst thing you can possibly do is anonymous 360 feedback, because let me tell you what the first thing happens is by who said that about me, I bet I'll bet you that was Paul. He doesn't like me, as opposed to in an open forum in a controlled environment. Paul says to me Look, Rosie. Yeah, I love the way you're really enthusiastic. Can you please just not bought in as much in meetings? Yeah, we love your input. Barbie doll. Paula, thank you very much. I didn't realize that. I was doing that. Fantastic. We have a conversation. It's facilitated by someone in the room, as opposed to who said that? Who was enlightened said that about me. Bloody that's not me. Oh, yeah, I reckon I know who it is. So 360 anonymous feedback. That's not creating a psychological safety and a safe environment. Leaders receiving feedback, right time, right place, right? Wait, that's creating a really safe environment for everyone to be honest and open and transparent about what's valued and what's challenged.

Paul Barnett 05:46

When a psychological safe environment has been created, athletes will perform with confidence and not focus on a fear of making mistakes. World Cup winning cricket Coach Mark Robinson explains the role of forgiveness in creating this type of environment.

Mark Robinson 06:04

Poor behavior is happening for a reason. What's driving it? What's What's the trigger? What's what's behind that and think sometimes we can go to the condemning bit too quickly. So as opposed to trying to take the extra time to tell what's causing somebody to always be late, or whatever it is. Moody mood

that later, what are the what's what's driving it. And if you try and get underneath it, and from a plane point of view, it's the same as we're trying to give the player the confidence to go out and play next, and feel safe enough to make mistakes. And I suppose that's what it is in practice you can make, allow them to make mistakes, and also accept mistakes. And again, that's why I said at the beginning to you, as a coach, you've got to forgive, you got to DVD players and make sure they feel forgiven.

Paul Barnett 06:51

Another World Cup winning coach, Gary, Kirsten builds on this idea of confidence by explaining how an environment where people feel free to express themselves and their abilities can be very powerful.

Gary Kirsten 07:05

And I just think if you can get close to that, as a coach of a group of people, where individuals in your team can really be fairly open around just where they are as human beings, and you build some trust in that I think you then allow that expression of talent and that expression of this as who I am as a human being. And if I'm in this team, because you think I've got some talent, and you allow me to express myself, in my abilities as a human being in a very powerful way, I think you can achieve a lot. Yes, they are frameworks that we all have to work in because you're part of teams. So it's not just about this is not your own show, and you just do what you want to do. I think there are frameworks. But it's wonderful to see that real expression of an individual in a team where he's really thriving in that environment because you can be who he needs to be within the framework of what the team requirements

Paul Barnett 07:56

are. The presence of psychological safety will also help people push forward with courage. But to achieve this, as the leader, you must start by making sure that everyone feels welcome. Sue Enquist has coached at the elite level in multiple sports. And she explains this idea by using the analogy of a party.

Sue Enquist 08:23

I always tell leaders, I often say, think about leadership, like you're hosting a party. And when you're sorry, you provide everything even the things you don't like. Like okay, here are the veggies. I hate veggies. I love candy. So I've got veggies and candy and meat for the party. The minute someone walks in, you're there to grab the door and welcome them in. Why aren't we doing that in the athletic field? Why aren't we doing that? in corporate America? Why are we grabbing that new employee and saying, Hey, I hope we have everything here for you. We see you. We want you to be comfortable and safe because when people feel safe, they'll go for it when it comes to courage.

Paul Barnett 09:03

With an environment that emphasizes psychological safety in place, and with people feeling comfortable, you are then able to push and challenge people and conversely, take them out of their comfort zone. Here is gold medal winning soccer coach Beverly Pressman explaining this somewhat paradoxical link.

Bev Priestman 09:22

Like it's little things like what is it that got us on top? What's going to keep us on top? What's going to stop us from winning? It's very open questions that I think you'll get a true honesty. And part of that is create an environment where people feel safe and comfortable, and to be able to see what they think but then also an environment that pushes and challenges and drives a comfort zone because I think when people get out the comfort zone, you see a whole new level to what they can bring. So I would say just open questions, questions that take the brain to a spin on the top of the podium most common dead last and preparing the brain have that and, and ask them those hard questions.

Paul Barnett 10:04

As the leader of the team, you will receive a broader range of views and ideas if you can unlock psychological safety. And this will then help you find better solutions for the team. Here is another gold medal winning coach, Tim Walsh.

Tim Walsh 10:20

I think generally someone is thinking different to you, then it's it creates a bit of certainly some deeper thought, but some friction, and then you debate and look at things in a different way. And that happens in a multitude of different ways.

Paul Barnett 10:36

As a leader, perhaps the best place to start when it comes to creating psychological safety is with yourself. Here is three time premierships coach, Damien Hardwick explaining how when he stopped trying to be someone else, and focus more on being authentic with his players and staff and opening up to them, the more they were willing in turn to open up to him, I

Damien Hardwick 10:59

think what happens is when you step into coaching, you're always trying to replicate the great coaches that you've had. So you're trying to take the very bits, best bits out of them, and try to morph them into you. And there's no question I was trying to do exactly the same. But what you tend to do is when you're trying to be someone else, you're not actually bringing out yourself and you're not realizing why other people employed you in the first place. They employed you because of who you are. So always trying to be an imposter of sorts. I was trying to be the great Elsa Clark's and Kevin Sheedy Mark Williams get as pagan or as I wasn't being a hate would refer to myself in third person, but wasn't being the very best version of Damien Hardwick. And that's what that that course taught me just do what you do do it? Well, because I've got incredible strengths in certain areas. But I've also got areas that I'm not great at. And what I had to learn and understand is I didn't have to be great at everything, I just had to be great at certain things. And the one thing I found is that I could complement myself with other people in my organization. I was very good at this. But you know what, it's not my strength, that area. So I'm going to employ someone who's an expert in that field. And that was, uh, one thing I think that I, that I learned was, I had to step back and I had to swallow my ego. Because I reckon the hardest thing as a leader sometimes is to say, You know what, in front of your players, boys, I don't know the answer. You know, as a leader, you always think you've got to have every answer, but the fact of the matter is, players can they got a great understanding when you're bullshitting them, excuse the language, but they got a great understanding. It's saying, Listen, you're full of crap. And I think what the players started to understand and really like is effect boys. I don't know why we lost the game, the mayor, and

we did but we're going to find out we'll get back with the answer. There's a group of coaches and the more I opened up to the players, the more they opened up to me and

Paul Barnett 12:43

we hope you enjoyed our episode on psychological safety, and found one or two things that you can bring to your own dinner table, locker room, or boardroom table for discussion. The key lessons I have taken away on psychological safety from my interview guests are psychological safety is created by the leader and starts with them being willing to be open about their own failures and shortcomings, while at the same time also being open to receiving feedback from the whole organization. When the safety grows within the team, athletes will feel confident enough to perform without a fear of making mistakes. In turn, they will grow in their confidence in expressing their own individuality. They will also perform with more courage when required, and be open to being challenged so that they now move out of their comfort zone. Here at the great coaches podcast, we are always trying to improve so please let us know if you have any feedback. Just like Scott McQueen, who said, thanks for sharing love your podcasts, some great leadership insights across many exceptional coaches. Thanks, God. The interaction with the people around the world who listen gives us great energy. And so if you have any feedback or comments, please let us know. All the details on how to connect with us are in the show notes or on our website, the great coaches podcast.com